

Introductory and closing music:

http://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/musica/b/beethoven/op73_n5/kj/mp3/beethove_co5_o_p73_kj_02_adagi.mp3

Beethoven Piano Concerto no 5

Artur Rubinstein

Symphony of the Air

Conducted by Josef Krips

Second Movement

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Excerpt from Eolaus, by Jame Allen, read by Cathy Barratt

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Rhapsodize Audio presents:

The Burning Bush

A examination of the relationship between poetry and the numinous.

Devised and presented by Denis Daly.

As Voltaire said: "If God did not exist, man would have to create him." Since time immemorial man has sensed the existence of a force external to himself, a source of great power, fecundity and unpredictability. A further aspect of this power is its apparent continuance beyond the limits of human life and death. In the search for a greater sense of security in a volatile and often inexplicable world man has sought in a great variety of ways to understand and enlist the support of this power. Philosophy, religion and literature may be seen as three great cultural endeavours inspired by this desire for reconciliation with the forces of creation.

One of the most famous descriptions of an encounter between man and God is found in Chapter 3 of the Book of Exodus:

<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/book.php?book=Exodus&chapter=3&verse=>

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the

God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

Here we find imagery of the greatest power. The bush which burns but is not consumed by the fire is an image of the essence of creation. Just as fire is itself an illusion created by radiant heat, the world of manifestation is also an illusion, presenting an appearance of solidity because of the extreme rapidity of movement of its constituent atoms. God speaks to Moses from the centre of bush, in other words, from the inner stillness, which is unaffected by the furious activity on the outside. Moses is bidden to "put off his shoes": he is in a place of eternal destination, where shoes are unnecessary. The Lord identifies himself thoroughly: and Moses hides his face for fear, just as did the disciples of Jesus at the transfiguration. And, most significantly, while the bush has long since disappeared, the words attributed to the divine have continued to resound down through the ages.

The scriptures of the world have been viewed in many ways: as the actual word of God, as religious propaganda, as epics of cultural history, as explications of man's search to understand the universe, or even as folklore. Poetry, which is, among other things, an attempt to build a bridge between the mundane and the transcendent, has often been used to articulate the struggle of man to attain a universal awareness. While theology may be said to be an attempt to define the mechanics of a divine order of creation, poetry can be seen as the observation of the wonders generated by the process of creation.

The poet is in a unique position to examine the relationships between the microcosm and the macrocosm, between the fleeting and the eternal, and, within the ultimate dichotomy, between the observer and the observed. By its nature poetry has the potential not just to stimulate the senses and entertain the intellect but also to delve into the existential dilemma itself. Poetry contains the sense we are able to make of it - in the search for meaning we not only affirm what we do know but also become aware of the limits of our understanding.

Hence the relationship between man and infinity has been a very fruitful source of material for poets. Whether that infinity is personalized as a being of unlimited power and knowledge or interpreted as the void from which all creation arises and into which it again retires, its existence represents the supreme challenge to man's ability to define himself. He is ever searching for the "truth that will set him free", and poets have contributed greatly to the elucidation, if not so much to the satisfaction of that search.

Turning back to one of the first and best known collections of devotional literature, the book of Psalms, we find a basic alternation of attitudes to the deity. When he is at his most benign and approachable, we are encouraged to rejoice in the unfailing sweetness of the divine succour, as in the famous Psalm 23.

<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/book.php?book=Psalms&chapter=23&verse=>
Psalm 23

1 (A Psalm of David.) The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

On the other hand, when the protection of the divine hand appears to have been withdrawn, and man has little capacity to defend himself against the machinations of the forces of evil, all he can do is cry out in supplication as in Psalm 130.

<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Psalms-Chapter-130/>

1 (A Song of degrees.) Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

2 Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

3 If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

6 My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

7 Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

8 And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Overall, the ancient Biblical deity appears to be one that can be appeased, praised, satisfied and angered, but not one that can be approached personally. The best the devotee can hope for is to experience the beneficence, but not the companionship of the divine.

From the tribal God of the Old Testament we now move to the more universal God of the New Testament. In the opening of the gospel according to John the whole mystery of creation is addressed in language so charged with significance that it cannot be said to be either prose or verse. Here the author is delineating the very building blocks of the universe, and, it should be noted that, as in the episode of the burning bush, the motive power is sound, not vision.

<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/John-Chapter-1/>

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
In him was life; and the life was the light of men.
And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

The author then commences to personalize his narrative, from which emerges the familiar gospel story. The New Testament God seems to have a more personal interest in the development of his creation, and hence are developed the themes of redemption and an eternal intimate co-existence with the deity. However a new level of anxiety is injected into the relationship with the divine. When the folk of the Old Testament behaved badly, God punished them for their specific misdeeds. After the appropriate expiation was made a harmonious relationship was restored. On the other hand the God of the New Testament is said to love his creatures deeply: therefore they must have done something profoundly offensive to alienate him. Hence developed the doctrines of original sin and the atonement: man is presented as intrinsically unworthy of the favour of God and must be restored to the good opinion of the divine by a process of salvation. This conviction of personal worthlessness has not only caused a great deal of suffering in the world, but has also been the springboard for much great poetry.

Moving forward two millenia, we find that the search for salvation has indeed become more personalized. Sir Walter Raleigh (1554 - 1618), a man who experienced the extreme vicissitudes of fortune during a very adventurous life, appears to have regarded God as a distant judge, rather remote from the fretful humans trying to establish some sort of concord with him. Raleigh's "scallop shell of quiet" is the venue in which one can, as the Psalmist says, "be still and know that I am God."

From Daiphantus, 1604 ; written about 1603.

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/pilgrim.htm>

THE PASSIONATE MAN'S PILGRIMAGE.

GIVE me my scallop-shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope's true gage ;
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.

Blood must be my body's balmer,
No other balm will there be given ;
Whilst my soul, like a quiet palmer,
Travelleth towards the land of heaven ;
Over the silver mountains,
Where spring the nectar fountains :
There will I kiss
The bowl of bliss ;
And drink mine everlasting fill
Upon every milken hill :

My soul will be a-dry before ;
But after, it will thirst no more.
Then by that happy blestful day,
 More peaceful pilgrims I shall see,
That have cast off their rags of clay,
 And walk apparelled fresh like me.
 I'll take them first
 To quench their thirst,
And taste of nectar suckets,
 At those clear wells
 Where sweetness dwells
Drawn up by saints in crystal buckets.

And when our bottles and all we
Are filled with immortality,
Then the blessed paths we'll travel,
Strowed with rubies thick as gravel ;
Ceilings of diamonds, sapphire floors,
High walls of coral, and pearly bowers.
From thence to heavens's bribeless hall,
Where no corrupted voices brawl ;
No conscience molten into gold,
No forged accuser bought or sold,
No cause deferred, nor vain-spent journey ;
For there Christ is the King's Attorney,
Who pleads for all without degrees,
And he hath angels, but no fees.
And when the grand twelve-million jury
Of our sins, with direful fury,
'Gainst our souls black verdicts give,
Christ pleads his death, and then we live.

Be thou my speaker, taintless pleader,
Unblotted lawyer, true proceeder !
Thou giv'st salvation even for alms ;
Not with a bribèd lawyer's palms.
And this is my eternal plea
To him that made heaven, earth, and sea,
That, since my flesh must die so soon,
And want a head to dine next noon,
Just at the stroke, when my veins start and spread,
Set on my soul an everlasting head.
Then am I ready, like a palmer fit ;
To tread those blest paths which before I writ.

Raleigh's earlier meditation indicates his belief in a future state of permanent beatitude,

but at the end, plagued by ill-health and battered by political reversals, he seems to believe that death really is the final curtain.

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/lifeman.htm>

On the Life of Man

What is our life? a play of passion,
Our mirth the musicke of division,
Our mothers wombes the tyring houses be,
When we are drest for this short Comedy,
Heaven the Judicious sharpe spector is,
That sits and markes still who doth act amisse,
Our graves that hide us from the searching Sun,
Are like drawne curtaynes when the play is done,
Thus march we playing to our latest rest,
Onely we dye in earnest, that's no Jest.

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/evensuch.htm>

EVEN SUCH IS TIME.

Even such is time, that takes on trust
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
And pays us but with earth and dust ;
Who, in the dark and silent grave,
When we have wandered all our ways,
Shuts up the story of our days ;
But from this earth, this grave, this dust
My God shall raise me up, I trust !

For George Herbert (1593 - 1633) the Divine represents not the supreme executive power but the supreme attractiveness. God here is the great lover, hiding his ineffable beauty behind the tawdry appeal of nature. In avoidance of theological rigour, Herbert's verse is similar in spirit to the rhapsodic outpourings of Hindu mystical poets, like Mirabai, Kabir and, much later, Paramahansa Yogananda. However, Herbert also displays a diplomatic diffidence, which is peculiarly English.

Here are two of his sonnets:

<http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/sonnet1.htm>

[Sonnet (I)]

My God, where is that ancient heat towards thee,
Wherewith whole showls of Martyrs once did burn,
Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry
Wear Venus livery? only serve her turn?
Why are not Sonnets made of thee? and layes
Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise
As well as any she? Cannot thy Dove
Out-strip their Cupid easily in flight?
Or, since thy wayes are deep, and still the fame,
Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name!
Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might
Each breast does feel, no braver fuel choose
Than that, which one day, Worms, may chance refuse?

<http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/sonnet2.htm>

[Sonnet (II)]

Sure Lord, there is enough in thee to dry
Oceans of Ink ; for, as the Deluge did
Cover the Earth, so doth thy Majesty :
Each Cloud distills thy praise, and doth forbid
Poets to turn it to another use.
Roses and Lillies speak thee ; and to make
A pair of Cheeks of them, is thy abuse.
Why should I Womens eyes for Chrystal take?
Such poor invention burns in their low mind,
Whose fire is wild, and doth not upward go
To praise, and on thee Lord, some Ink bestow.
Open the bones, and you shall nothing find
In the best face but filth, when Lord, in thee
The beauty lies, in the discovery.

Like Herbert, Henry Vaughan (1621 - 1695) regarded the Divine as a friend, but one whom man had offended by neglect, rather than comission of evil acts. Vaughan appears to have believed in a state of primordial blessedness, totally satisfactory in itself, from which man chooses to stray. Sin, for Vaughan, is man denying himself his innate and indestructible happiness by allowing himself to be distracted by the ephemeral reflections of nature. In "The Relapse" Vaughan does pay nominal tribute to the doctrine of the Atonement when he says "But He that with His blood—a price too dear — My scores did pay. " However, his main emphasis is on the supernal beauty of Divine union, and he intimates that the supreme punishment - separation from the divine - is essentially self-inflicted, and needs no augmentation by the horrors of a deliberately created inferno. Here are two of his best known poems:

<http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/retreat.htm>

THE RETREAT.

by Henry Vaughan

HAPPY those early days, when I
Shin'd in my angel-infancy !
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white, celestial thought ;
When yet I had not walk'd above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back—at that short space—
Could see a glimpse of His bright face ;
When on some gilded cloud, or flow'r,
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity ;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My conscience with a sinful sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A sev'ral sin to ev'ry sense,
But felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

O how I long to travel back,
And tread again that ancient track !
That I might once more reach that plain,
Where first I left my glorious train ;
From whence th' enlighten'd spirit sees
That shady City of palm-trees.
But ah ! my soul with too much stay
Is drunk, and staggers in the way !
Some men a forward motion love,
But I by backward steps would move ;
And when this dust falls to the urn,
In that state I came, return.

THE RELAPSE.

by Henry Vaughan

<http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/mygod.htm>

MY God, how gracious art Thou ! I had slipt
Almost to hell,

And on the verge of that dark, dreadful pit
 Did hear them yell ;
 But O Thy love ! Thy rich, almighty love,
 That sav'd my soul,
 And check'd their fury, when I saw them move,
 And heard them howl !
 O my sole Comfort, take no more these ways,
 This hideous path,
 And I will mend my own without delays :
 Cease Thou Thy wrath !
 I have deserv'd a thick, Egyptian damp,
 —Dark as my deeds—
 Should mist within me, and put out that lamp
 Thy Spirit feeds ;
 A darting conscience full of stabs, and fears ;
 No shade but yew,
 Sullen, and sad eclipses, cloudy spheres,
 These are my due.
 But He that with His blood—a price too dear—
 My scores did pay,
 Bid me, by virtue from Him, challenge here
 The brightest day ;
 Sweet, downy thoughts, soft lily-shades, calm streams,
 Joys full, and true,
 Fresh, spicy mornings, and eternal beams,—
 These are His due.

Like Henry Vaughn Gerard Manly Hopkins (1844–1889) was a man of the cloth. However, Hopkins' God, by comparison, appears very unfriendly. Unlike the writer of the Psalm, who appears to believe that God, while distant and prone to wrath, is generally inclined to be benevolent, Hopkins' deity is an impacable taskmaster, and the best the devotee can hope for is that he will be suitably placated. The God in Hopkins' verse demands but does not console, and creates rules which are almost impossible to follow but for the breaking of which man will be severely punished.

"Thou art indeed just, Lord" represents Hopkins' attempt to reason with this stern and irritable deity. At the end, the poet implores: "Send my roots rain" - a sad and artfully devised appeal which could be rendered more colloquially: "Help me to like you."

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173669>

'Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend'
 BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum; verumtamen
 justa loquar ad te: Quare via impiorum prosperatur? &c.

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend

With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.
Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?

Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
Now, leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build – but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

In "No worst, there is none" Hopkins paints a vivid picture of spiritual depression. In this harrowing soliloquy Hopkins depicts the most agonizing aspect of his suffering - that it counts for nothing, that it does not make him more worthy and that God appears totally unaware of it. Hopkins, a man of great intellectual gifts and also one with strong inclinations for passionate personal relationships, is confronted by a god who disdains the former and disapproves of the latter. For Hopkins, the doctrine of the atonement must have been particularly bitter: the suffering of Christ on the cross redeemed the world while the poet's own suffering has no value even for himself.

'No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief.'
BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173663>

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief
Woe, wórl'd-sorrow; on an áge-old anvil wince and sing —
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief.'"

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

In Pied Beauty, the prodigal virtuosity of God's creative power as evidenced in nature has but one purpose - not for the unalloyed delectation of man but for man to be reminded who is in charge. This remarkable poem can be divided into two parts; the first nine lines, with their dazzling word-spinning and the final two, wherein is stated the absolute need for homage to the creator.

Pied Beauty
BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173664>

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

Although he was a tortured, sickly and dissipated soul, Francis Thompson (1859 - 1907), unlike Hopkins, did not doubt that the Divine took a personal benevolent interest in him. In his poem, "Kingdom of Heaven" he marvels at the nearness of the numinous, while also observing its ungraspability. Thompson, who was something of a reprobate in his personal life, appears to have no concern with his unworthiness or fear that he will be excluded from inclusion in the divine beneficence. Unlike the verse of Hopkins, Thompson's lines are not stained by suffering - he revels in the inner assurance that all will be swept resistlessly into the arms of the Divine.

[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Heaven_\(Thompson\)](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Heaven_(Thompson))

Kingdom of Heaven

O WORLD invisible, we view thee,
O World intangible, we touch thee,
O World unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air-
That we ask the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!-
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places; -
Turn but a stone, but start with a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendour thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry; -and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry; -clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

Thomson's most famous poem, is of course, *The Hound of Heaven*. Unlike the Deity of Herbert and Vaughan, who appeals modestly for the attention of man, the God of Thomson's poem is a hunter, relentlessly pursuing the devotee, battering him with misfortune until the prodigal child returns by his own choice to the inner Eden. In this inspiring panegyric, God is portrayed as the ultimate and infinite comforter.

http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Hound_of_Heaven

The Hound of Heaven

I FLED Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'

I pleaded, outlaw-wise,
By many a hearted casement, curtained red,
Trellised with intertwining charities;
(For, though I knew His love Who followèd,
Yet was I sore adread
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside).
But, if one little casement parted wide,
The gust of His approach would clash it to.
Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue.
Across the margent of the world I fled,
And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,
Smiting for shelter on their clangèd bars;
Fretted to dulcet jars
And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon.
I said to Dawn: Be sudden—to Eve: Be soon;
With thy young skiey blossoms heap me over
From this tremendous Lover—
Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!
I tempted all His servitors, but to find
My own betrayal in their constancy,
In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.
To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;
Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
But whether they swept, smoothly fleet,
The long savannahs of the blue;
Or whether, Thunder-driven,
They clanged his chariot 'thwart a heaven,
Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn o' their feet:—
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat—
'Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.'

I sought no more that after which I strayed
In face of man or maid;
But still within the little children's eyes
Seems something, something that replies,
They at least are for me, surely for me!
I turned me to them very wistfully;
But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair
With dawning answers there,
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair.
'Come then, ye other children, Nature's—share

With me' (said I) 'your delicate fellowship;
Let me greet you lip to lip,
Let me twine with you caresses,
Wantoning
With our Lady-Mother's vagrant tresses,
Banqueting
With her in her wind-walled palace,
Underneath her azured daïs,
Quaffing, as your taintless way is,
From a chalice
Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring.'
So it was done:
I in their delicate fellowship was one—
Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies.
I knew all the swift importings
On the wilful face of skies;
I knew how the clouds arise
Spumèd of the wild sea-snortings;
All that's born or dies
Rose and drooped with; made them shapers
Of mine own moods, or wailful or divine;
With them joyed and was bereaven.
I was heavy with the even,
When she lit her glimmering tapers
Round the day's dead sanctities.
I laughed in the morning's eyes.
I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
Heaven and I wept together,
And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;
Against the red throb of its sunset-heart
I laid my own to beat,
And share commingling heat;
But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.
In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's grey cheek.
For ah! we know not what each other says,
These things and I; in sound I speak—
Their sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.
Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;
Let her, if she would owe me,
Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me
The breasts o' her tenderness:
Never did any milk of hers once bless
My thirsting mouth.
Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
With unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy;
And past those noisèd Feet
A voice comes yet more fleet—

'Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me!'

Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!
My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten me to my knee;
I am defenceless utterly.
I slept, methinks, and woke,
And, slowly gazing, find me stripped in sleep.
In the rash lustihead of my young powers,
I shook the pillaring hours
And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears,
I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years—
My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.
My days have crackled and gone up in smoke,
Have puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.
Yea, faileth now even dream
The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist;
Even the linked fantasies, in whose blossomy twist
I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist,
Are yielding; cords of all too weak account
For earth with heavy griefs so overplussed.
Ah! is Thy love indeed
A weed, albeit an amaranthine weed,
Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?
Ah! must—
Designer infinite!—
Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?
My freshness spent its wavering shower i' the dust;
And now my heart is as a broken fount,
Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever
From the dank thoughts that shiver
Upon the sighful branches of my mind.
Such is; what is to be?
The pulp so bitter, how shall taste the rind?
I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity;
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.
But not ere him who summoneth
I first have seen, enwound
With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned;
His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.
Whether man's heart or life it be which yields
Thee harvest, must Thy harvest-fields
Be dunged with rotten death?

Now of that long pursuit

Comes on at hand the bruit;
 That Voice is round me like a bursting sea:
 'And is thy earth so marred,
 Shattered in shard on shard?
 Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!
 Strange, piteous, futile thing!
 Wherefore should any set thee love apart?
 Seeing none but I makes much of naught' (He said),
 'And human love needs human meriting:
 How hast thou merited—
 Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?
 Alack, thou knowest not
 How little worthy of any love thou art!
 Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
 Save Me, save only Me?
 All which I took from thee I did but take,
 Not for thy harms,
 But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
 All which thy child's mistake
 Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
 Rise, clasp My hand, and come!
 Halts by me that footfall:
 Is my gloom, after all,
 Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
 'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
 I am He Whom thou seekest!
 Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.'

The challenges posed to religious orthodoxy by the development of scientific thought in the mid nineteenth Century had a profound impact on religious thought. Exposure to translations of Buddhist and Hindu scripture and the cogitations of free-thinking radicals like Emerson also contributed to a broadening of religious philosophy in the West, and led to new applications of religious principles in daily life. An eclectic religious movement which eventually became known as the New Thought Movement gradually developed and its principles have formed the basis of much popular psychology of the Twentieth Century.

Most of the New Thought authors, such as Henry Hamblin, Henry Drummond, Wallace D. Wattles and Thomas Troward wrote earnest treatises expounding non-denominational spiritual doctrines and practices of personal self-improvement. Very few of these authors branched out into poetry, with the notable exception of James Allen (1864 - 1912), the author of the celebrated self-help classic, "As a Man Thinketh." Allen wrote a collection of poems in which he presents his maxims in verse that is sometimes very skillfully wrought. All of Allen's writings are centred upon the issue of self development and he very deliberately eschews any discussion of matters which he does not consider to be related to the spiritual path.

Here is one of his sombre reflections on the search for divine union:

<http://james-allen.in1woord.nl/?text=poems-of-peace#c06>

Long I sought thee

Long I sought thee, Spirit holy,
Master Spirit, meek and lowly;
Sought thee with a silent sorrow, brooding o'er the woes of men ;
Vainly sought thy yoke of meekness
'Neath the weight of woe and weakness;
Finding not, yet in my failing, seeking o'er and o'er again.

In unrest and doubt and sadness
Dwelt I, yet I knew thy Gladness
Waited somewhere ; somewhere greeted torn and sorrowing hearts like mine ;
Knew that somehow I should find thee,
Leaving sin and woe behind me,
And at last thy Love would bid me enter into Rest divine.

Hatred, mockery, and reviling
Scorched my seeking soul, defiling
That which should have been thy Temple, wherein thou should'st move and dwell ;
Praying, striving, hoping, calling ;
Suffering, sorrowing in my falling,
Still I sought thee, groping blindly in the gloomy depths of hell.

And I sought thee till I found thee;
And the dark Powers all around me
Fled and left me silent, peaceful, brooding o'er thy holy themes ;
From within me and without me
Fled they when I ceased to doubt thee ;
And I found thee in thy Glory, mighty Master of my dreams !

Yea, I found thee, Spirit holy,
Beautiful and pure and lowly;
Found thy Joy and Peace and Gladness ; found thee in thy House of Rest;
Found thy strength in Love and Meekness,
And my pain and woe and weakness
Left me, and I walked the Pathway trodden only by the blest.

Most of Allen's poems are short and pithy. His single extended essay in poetic form is the lyrical dramatic poem, Eolaus, which describes the journey of an earnest seeker from an initial state of bewildered doubt, through dalliances with at first worldly and then spiritual pleasures, and culminating in a meeting with a sage. After a long exposition of the true spiritual path, the sage leaves Eolaus, who must complete his journey by himself. The poem closes with the following words, spoken not by the sage or a personal deity, but by

the impersonal Cosmos who reveals a picture of a universe of infinite scope and power but one which also offers the ultimate refuge to the true seeker. In its simplicity and power this description matches the Vision of Visions in Chapter 11 of the Bhavagad Gita. Here is the voice of Cosmos, interpreted for us by Cathy Barratt.

<http://james-allen.in1woord.nl/?text=poems-of-peace#c01>

Cosmos

I am; Perfection is, and Peace ;
Evil is gone, beholding Me ;
And they from sin and sorrow cease
Who look upon my Symmetry.
When fault and failure find my Form,
Lo, fault and failure are no more !
I am the sunshine and the storm,
The whisper, and the ocean's roar !
The creeping action that deceives,
The lie, the theft, the murderer's ire,
All these my Crucible receive,
They burn in my Celestial Fire.
All superstitions, errors, wiles,
The crawling craft, the cruel lust,
All that debases and defiles
I grind, and scatter in in the dust.
The Nations rise, the Empires fall,
And I eternally rehearse,
To scene and strain majestic,
The Drama of the Universe.
The Eons pass, the systems pale,
Unchanged their changes behold ;
They listen, and I tell my Tale;
I all their fleeting forms enfold.
Who knoweth Me, becometh Me;
Who hath my Vision finds release
From Darkness and Captivity.
I am ; Perfection is, and Peace.

Allen's last published work was the Divine Companion, the central section of which is a discourse between a master and a student which presents a further refinement of the message conveyed by the sage in Eolaus. The work closes with the following words which attempt to depict the state of one who has passed beyond the need for forgiveness, justification and approval from a deity. Morality has served its purposes, and in a world which knows no opposites, struggle has ceased and only peace remains.

The Divine Companion

Discourse Concerning the Way of Truth

3. Self-surrender

<http://james-allen.in1woord.nl/?text=the-divine-companion#p3c13c>

Arisen, awakened, healed, and made perfect;
He has unveiled the Face of the Highest ;
He knows the Great Rest,
The Deep Silence,
The Profound Peace.
In the Light which knows no darkness he walks,
And it casts no shadow on his pathway.

One of the best known spiritual teachers of the twentieth century was Paramahansa Yogananda (1893 - 1952), a prolific author and the composer of some of the most intense devotional poetry in world literature. Yogananda's creativity was fueled by religious ecstasy rather than theological speculation, and his presentations of an undeniable immanent divinity are striking in their conviction and enthusiasm. Yogananda's God is not only approachable, but like Thompson's Hound of Heaven urgently craves the love of the devotee. In fact, Thompson's poem was a great favourite of Yogananda's, who actually recorded a portion of it.

We finish this short poetic survey with Yogananda's poem Samadhi, which by virtue of having been included in the original edition of Yogananda's Autobiography of a Yogi, is the only one of his poems which is currently in the public domain. In treating his supernal subject, the poet eschews technical artifice: largely shorn of metre and rhyme, the text rolls forward in a series of coruscations, as it describes that supreme subsuming of the personal identity into the universal oneness, where the "dewdrop has slipped into the shining sea."

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/7452/7452-h/7452-h.htm>

Samadhi

Vanished the veils of light and shade,
Lifted every vapor of sorrow,
Sailed away all dawns of fleeting joy,
Gone the dim sensory mirage.
Love, hate, health, disease, life, death,
Perished these false shadows on the screen of duality.
Waves of laughter, scyllas of sarcasm, melancholic whirlpools,
Melting in the vast sea of bliss.
The storm of maya stilled
By magic wand of intuition deep.
The universe, forgotten dream, subconsciously lurks,
Ready to invade my newly-wakened memory divine.
I live without the cosmic shadow,

But it is not, bereft of me;
As the sea exists without the waves,
But they breathe not without the sea.
Dreams, wakings, states of deep turia sleep,
Present, past, future, no more for me,
But ever-present, all-flowing I, I, everywhere.
Planets, stars, stardust, earth,
Volcanic bursts of doomsday cataclysms,
Creation's molding furnace,
Glaciers of silent x-rays, burning electron floods,
Thoughts of all men, past, present, to come,
Every blade of grass, myself, mankind,
Each particle of universal dust,
Anger, greed, good, bad, salvation, lust,
I swallowed, transmuted all
Into a vast ocean of blood of my own one Being!
Smoldering joy, oft-puffed by meditation
Blinding my tearful eyes,
Burst into immortal flames of bliss,
Consumed my tears, my frame, my all.
Thou art I, I am Thou,
Knowing, Knower, Known, as One!
Tranquilled, unbroken thrill, eternally living, ever-new peace!
Enjoyable beyond imagination of expectancy, samadhi bliss!
Not an unconscious state
Or mental chloroform without wilful return,
Samadhi but extends my conscious realm
Beyond limits of the mortal frame
To farthest boundary of eternity
Where I, the Cosmic Sea,
Watch the little ego floating in Me.
The sparrow, each grain of sand, fall not without My sight.
All space floats like an iceberg in My mental sea.
Colossal Container, I, of all things made.
By deeper, longer, thirsty, guru-given meditation
Comes this celestial samadhi .
Mobile murmurs of atoms are heard,
The dark earth, mountains, vales, lo! molten liquid!
Flowing seas change into vapors of nebulae!
Aum blows upon vapors, opening wondrously their veils,
Oceans stand revealed, shining electrons,
Till, at last sound of the cosmic drum,
Vanish the grosser lights into eternal rays
Of all-pervading bliss.
From joy I came, for joy I live, in sacred joy I melt.
Ocean of mind, I drink all creation's waves.
Four veils of solid, liquid, vapor, light,
Lift aright.

Myself, in everything, enters the Great Myself.
Gone forever, fitful, flickering shadows of mortal memory.
Spotless is my mental sky, below, ahead, and high above.
Eternity and I, one united ray.
A tiny bubble of laughter, I
Am become the Sea of Mirth Itself.

I hope you have enjoyed this short presentation on one of the vastest of subjects. It may be said that the aim of meditation, and indeed of all spiritual activity is "the peace which passeth understanding", the achievement of perfect stillness. In the mirror of the quieted mind, creation is reflected as the moon is reflected in a completely still body of water. The poet serves not only to articulate and celebrate this anechoic serenity, but also to describe what happens when the surface of the water is ruffled and we appear to be engulfed in the waves of joyous or tragic circumstances.

It is only fitting that the last word be left with a poet. Who better than Omar Khayyam to articulate the sublime state of dissatisfaction which drives so many poets:

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/246/246-h/246-h.htm#2H_4_0003

Ah, Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!
